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ABSTRACT

More and more minority children are making higher test scores, generally, due to a variety of factors. The high IQ minority child, therefore, might be better understood than previously. Most data in this area has been collected on black children and youth although other cultural groups in America are now being studied more closely. These include studies of other minorities and analyses of whites according to national origins. High IQ black children and youth are most often found in homes and communities similar to the homes and communities on which IQ tests were standardized. Most are middle and upper class children or their families are upwardly mobile with strong hopes and aspirations for their children. High IQ minority children are to be regarded in the same light as high IQ majority children. They are bright, quick children who will pick up the curriculum in a shorter period than most. Some are truly gifted children and should be afforded the independent study, career guidance and financial support which will enable society to benefit from the productive minds. Larger numbers of high IQ minority children can be expected to surface as more and more minority families reach middle class status. But the real challenge to parents and teachers and society, perhaps, is the full development of high IQ minority children from poverty families and gifted children from these families who have been identified by other means. The most important element in work with high ability minority children and youth is probably friendly encouragement and support. (Author/JM)

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HIGH IQ MINORITY CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

More and more schools and colleges are giving more attention to high ability minority children and youth. This is a welcome development and the nation will benefit from these efforts.

The search for talent in minority communities is proceeding on two fronts. One thrust seeks to utilize IQ tests in a judicious way to identify gifted children. Another thrust seeks to develop other tests and procedures to ferret out talent where IQ tests are less than completely accurate.

William Brazziel has researched and written extensively on talent conservation and development over the years. The material for this paper came from Dr. Brazziel's new book: *Quality Education for All Americans* (Howard University Press) which has a spring, 1974 publication date.

Many programs for gifted and talented minorities are being established in schools and colleges today. New procedures are being developed to ferret out talent in minority populations.

The question of whether to use IQ tests as part of or supplements to selection programs has been a subject of discussion. What sort of performance to expect in a given minority community is a source of concern. More and more minority children are making higher test scores, generally, due to a variety of factors, it seems. The high IQ minority child, therefore, might be better understood than previously, much to his benefit.

Many minority children score high on IQ tests. A black Los Angeles elementary school, for example, recently rang up the highest IQ average in the city (117 mean). One rather sarcastic newspaper columnist has noted that even in the face of hardships and the fact that intelligence means different things from culture to culture, 30 percent of black Americans score higher than 50 percent of white Americans in many IQ studies.

Some descriptions of the minority child most likely to score high on IQ tests might be helpful at this time. Both educators and parents and friends might benefit from findings in this area. Some parents have expressed concern about the proper interpretation of high scores of their children.

Most data in this area has been collected on black children and youth although other cultural groups in America are now being studied more closely. These include analyses of whites according to national origins and studies of other colored minorities. Paul Witty identified and studied black children and youth scoring in the genius category on IQ tests in the '40s and '50s.[1] The National Merit Scholarship Corporation assembled data on blacks who were awarded their prizes.[2] Witty's subjects scored in the range of 150-185 on IQ tests. Black National Merit Scholars or Semi-finalists have reached the ceiling (99th percentile) of this test.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

High IQ black children and youth are most often found in homes and communities similar to the homes and communities on which IQ tests were standardized. Most are middle class and upper class children or their families are upwardly mobile with strong hopes and aspirations for their children. The father of the highest scoring subject in the Witty sample, for example, was an electrical engineer. The writer observed the development of two young mathematical geniuses from a depressed area into advanced placement in the Harvard physics and mathematics program in the '60s. The key here was a most ambitious mother coupled with the children's nurturance by a powerful community group. Brains and concern overcame poverty.

Jane Mercer has studied these patterns in a California city of 100,000 population and a sizeable minority population. Mercer selected five modal characteristics of the 2200 white children on which a well-known IQ test was standardized. She then assembled a group of black children from families with all five modal characteristics and administered the test to these children. The mean IQ of these children was exactly the mean of the test and the spread of scores was the same as the norm group. Scores ranged up to the ceiling of the test (160) with exactly

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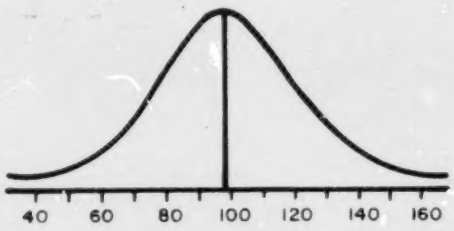
one-half of the blacks outscoring half of the whites in the norm group. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

Distribution of IQ Scores of Black Children from Families with Five Modal Characteristics of Norm Group

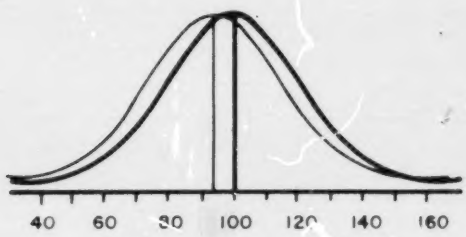


Source: Jane Mercer, Socio-Cultural Factors in Testing Minority Children, Proceedings of National Education Association Conference on Testing, Washington, D.C., February 10-12, 1973.

Fewer high IQ black children were found in Mercer's samples when only four of the five modal characteristics were present. The mean of the sample was five points lower than the norm group, yet, many children exceeded the mean group and scores still ranged up to the ceiling of the test. See Figure 2.

Figure 2

Distribution of IQ Scores of Black Children from Families with Four Modal Characteristics of Norm Group



Source: Jane Mercer, Socio-Cultural Factors in Testing Minority Children, Proceedings of National Education Association Conference on Testing, Washington, D.C., February 10-12, 1973

The mean was still lower when two of the Mercer Modal Characteristics were found and so on. This is instructive and offers means by which judicious interpretation of these scores can be made by parents and school people.

Mercer's Modal Family was comprised of two parents, four or fewer children, a father with a job rated 30 or above on an occupational rating scale (Duncan Socio-Economic Index) and a mother with aspirations of some college for the children. They lived in a home they owned or were planning to buy a home.

The status of the Modal Family is slightly above the average of families in American life but it is the type of family from which children were drawn to make up the norm group for the test. This discrepancy probably accounts as much as anything for the complaints of bias in tests of this type. Significantly, it is a status toward which blacks and other minorities are painfully nearing according to census reports.

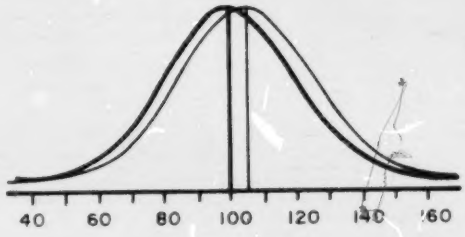
The question of comparability is probably more or less academic in this day and time, however. IQ tests are being used more judiciously than ever before with all children and the new testing systems will more and more enable school people to perhaps offer it upon request for teachers to assess the development of both minority and majority children who display unusual precocity or for parents who would like to have the same type of information.

OTHER GROUPS

Mercer found the same patterns in scores when the Modal index was applied to samples of Chicano children. These children were part of the same study. (Fig. 3 and 4).

Figure 3

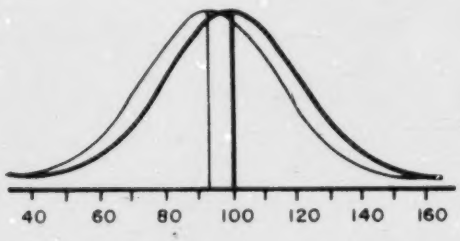
Distribution of IQ Scores of Chicano Children from Families with Five Modal Characteristics of Norm Group



Source: Jane Mercer, Socio-Cultural Factors in Testing Minority Children, Proceedings of National Education Association Conference on Testing, Washington, D.C., February 10-12, 1973.

Figure 4

Distribution of IQ Scores on Chicano Children from Families with Four Modal Characteristics of Norm Group



Source: Jane Mercer, Socio-Cultural Factors in Testing Minority Children, Proceedings of National Education Association Conference on Testing, Washington, D.C., February 10-12, 1973.

Two older studies by Wheeler[3] and Baldwin[4] found similar patterns for rural children in counties in less developed areas of two states. These children were mainly of English and German stock.

The counties were located in the Southeast and Midwest. Studies of other ethnic groups are not numerous but such studies will probably increase in the future. It is well to note here that a good Modal Family index will not result in all children placing above the mean on IQ tests. The norm group achieved a normal curve and so do the Modal families.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

High IQ minority children are to be regarded in the same light as high IQ majority children. They are bright, quick children who will pick up the curriculum in a shorter period than most. Some are truly gifted children and should be afforded the independent study, career guidance and financial support which will enable society to benefit from their productive minds.

Larger numbers of high IQ minority children can be expected to surface as more and more minority families reach middle class status. But the real challenge to parents and teachers and society, perhaps, is the full development of high IQ minority children from poverty families and gifted children from these families who have been identified by other means.

NEW TECHNIQUES OF TALENT IDENTIFICATION

New methods of talent identification are being developed which will more and more enable teachers and administrators to conserve and develop talent in distinctive cultural settings where IQ tests are not entirely accurate.

A widely used instrument is the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. This test seems little affected by cultural differences in children or vice-versa. It identifies children who have high ability to be flexible, fluent and original. Many teachers and school psychometrists are developing their own environment tests with items drawn from the immediate environment of the child. Children who show unusual facility in symbol manipulation, embellishment and divergence of ideas are given special attention.

Teacher observation is not new in talent identification but it is now being used in different ways. Children are now being observed closely in playground groups to identify leadership talent which might not surface in the regular classroom. Children given the role of "information giver" in groups are usually quite bright and are observed carefully in the modern classroom. Then, of course, many children simply stand out in classroom discussions and in the work of the class. Regardless of whether identification instruments are used or not, teachers sense that they are dealing with a mind apart and set about encouraging the child to develop his talent.

PROGRAMS FOR HIGH ABILITY MINORITY CHILDREN

George Carruthers is a black astro-physicist with three degrees from the University of Illinois. Dr. Carruthers won the 1972 Science Award of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for development of the lunar observatory installed by Apollo 16 Astronauts on the moon.

Dr. Carruthers never benefitted from any of the programs for gifted children prevalent during his high school years (1955-59) although they were spent, at least partly, in the days of increased concern over Russian progress in science. None of the resulting National Science Foundation programs ever reached Dr. Carruthers. He was not enrolled in a summer science institute or afforded access to outstanding scientists or anything else.

Dr. Carruthers attended Englewood High School on Chicago's Southside, you see, and programs for gifted children were simply not installed in schools like Englewood. Nor, and this is perhaps more important, in the elementary and middle schools that fed it. How sad!

Things are better now. The U.S. Office of Education now has a special unit dealing with gifted and talented children and many states are following suit. More high IQ and talented minority children are getting the independent study, the In and Out School Day and other attention and encouragement needed to develop their talents. But the millenium has not arrived. Hopefully the future will bring even more progress in this vital area. Immense benefits flow to society from a single productive mind. The new programs for gifted minority children and the new and improved methods of identifying candidates for them will surely serve us all well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Social tensions being what they are, the most important element in work with high ability minority children and youth is probably friendly encouragement and support. This is doubly true in the integrated school with few minority students and even fewer minority teachers. Too often a sense of beleagurement sets in and the high ability minority child might falter.

Wise principals and faculties will make every effort to see that every encouragement is offered gifted minority children and that community contacts and support are forthcoming from both minority and majority sources. In the case of the two young mathematical geniuses described above, student teachers identified their unusual talents in the primary grades and reported this information to a civic group with a strong committee on gifted children. Over a ten year period of time, the lads were afforded a variety of experiences with both the civic group and professionals in the community and at the local college. Their high school mathematics teacher had them over for brunch and bull sessions on occasion. A college statistics instructor arranged for summer work in the testing center. Another mathematics teacher at the high school arranged for the lads to attend a National Science Foundation program she was teaching at a university in the Southwest. A newspaper reporter and feature writer arranged for a Harvard scholarship by calling his old dean.

Significantly, the civic group, mathematics teachers and the college were all black as were the students. Many integrated schools can match this sort of support and encouragement but, sadly, many can't. And for the lack of this nail, etc. etc. Hopefully, the day will come when gifted minority students can receive the needed support and encouragement regardless of the school in which he is enrolled or the composition of the faculty. Much of the neglect in this area can be traced to a lack of awareness on the part of majority faculty. If we can hammer home the vital importance of this sort of thing for gifted minority children and if we can highlight improved practices for providing it, many faculties will respond.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT STUDY

Independent study looms large in programs for gifted disadvantaged minority children. Gifted children are great project people. Recall, if you will, the experiences of the gifted youth in project work at the local college and in the civic groups described above. Similar school work can be encouraged in addition to utilization of community and community college resources. Each project develops potentials for organization of material and reinforces confidence and motivation. Projects also require a wider diversity of reading to put together and children and youth meet a wider diversity of talented people as they work in college and community to do independent study on projects.

Some independent study done by talented students is fascinating. Students have delved into the workings of tornados replete with wind tunnel apparatus. They have compiled histories of the scientific development of household appliances and charted the migration of birds. Still others have made studies of communication systems of animals.

Astronomy holds a special fascination, it seems, and budding Gallileos have built their own telescopes, investigated optical illusions and built demonstration models of eclipses. Work around planetariums has been afforded gifted youngsters to their benefit.

Young mathematicians have plotted historical progressions of size and speed of modern vehicles, studied school costs and sources of income and completed demographic studies from census data. Some have delved into the secrets of the stock market. A few with extraordinary derring-do have looked into concepts of probability and number theory. A favorite past-time is gnawing at the carcasses of famous historical problems and paradoxes.

Language arts devotees have studied advertising for key phrases and psychological impact, written alternative endings to stories and studied the impact of the life and times of authors on their output of literature during the period involved. Studies of mythology are popular with the young wordsmiths as are Great Book Clubs and sheer output of poems, stories, essays and other creative offerings.

Young social scientists have studied holidays and noted original sources, studied women who shaped historical events and traced the paths of food items from planting and harvest to the table. Historical and contemporary juxtaposition of forms of societal organization and control are popular as are cultural and psychological studies of winners and losers in bids for high office. As expected, ecological studies rank high because of current emphasis and the wedding of natural and social science becomes more complete here than at any point as youngsters seek to conceptualize a science that serves and not rules.

The performing arts are well represented in programs for gifted children. Musicians with unusual talent find a chair in local college orchestras and small groups. Athletes are perhaps the most looked-after group. Summer camps, informal pick-up games and observation of practice sessions at the college develop skills and insights. Local children with dramatics ability find a role in college productions requiring children and youth. Modern dance and ballet groups are springing up.

It can safely be said that there are as many program characteristics as there are programs. Divergent thinking is the order of the day as imaginations of excellent minds soar in the consideration of the possible. There are threads which weave through all programs, however. Effective curriculums for gifted minority children will surely take forms in the years to come that few can visualize today. This is all to the good and many well-wishers are standing by to cheer the gifted program developers who are working so hard to bring these things about.

NOTES

[1] Paul Witty, et al, "Case Studies and Genetic Records of Gifted Negroes", Journal of Psychology, 1943, 151 165-181.

[2] Fred Borgen, *Able Black Americans in College* (Research Report), National Merit Scholarship Corporation, 1970.

[3] Lester Wheeler, "A Comparative Study of the Intelligence of East Tennessee Mountain Children", The Journal of Educational Psychology, May, 1942, pp. 321-33.

[4] B. T. Baldwin, et al, *Farm Children*, New York, Appleton, 1940, Chapter 13.